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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

September, 1891.

QUESTION CXLI.

Is there any truth in the frequent assertion that Theosophists look with disfavor upon marriage?

Ans.—None whatever. One might as well say that Theosophists look with disfavor upon houses or clothes or food or any other of the needs of human life. The Supreme Being, in framing the nature and conditions of humanity, has been pleased to arrange various functions as essential to its welfare and even its continuance, and we should not exhibit either reverence or good sense if we upheld some other system as wiser or finer. Nature—in other words, the expressed Wisdom of God—is probably more trustworthy than any crotchets of ours.

But of course there are all varieties of opinion among Theosophists, and in a perfectly unfettered Society there must be some members who hold queer or irrational notions about marriage. There must, indeed, be found such notions on all other social topics, but it is particularly the case with marriage because that has to do so largely with the sexual relation, and all

history discloses the singular tendency of religious fervor to an immediate interest in the reproductive system. That department of physiology would not seem especially attractive to spiritualized minds, yet in point of fact no other has ever received such instant and sustained attention. Its curious association with religion is most exemplified in Phallic ceremonies and symbols, but in lesser ways—theories, opinions, rules of life—the strange old conjunction manifests itself even in these days, and illustrates the slowness with which habit dies down or fails to crop out in new and improbable surroundings.

The entirely dispassionate observer—and of course observation is worthless which is not dispassionate—notices that the singular attraction of religious activity to the contemplation of the generative function is always accompanied by two equally singular phenomena. One is the invariable treatment of it as unique, standing on different ground from the other physiological processes, not at all to be grouped with respiration, digestion, and the like. To such elevation of it to the place of highest importance there would seem, indeed, this obvious objection,—that a man might pass a long life with it in disuse, whereas he could not live an hour if his lungs were stopped. But considerations of fact are often pooh-poohed when a doctrine is at stake, and so the connection of things is disjointed, and analogies are tossed away, and artificial and arbitrary distinctions are introduced where all would seem clear and simple.

The other is that a moral element is affixed to it which is never dreamed of in other physiological departments. Some extremists hold that the whole thing is wrong, and ought to be discarded once for all by every man who has a gleam of spiritual light within him. Some less pronounced, perceiving that this would mean either the extinction of the race or its continuance only by the unspiritual, insist that the function should be confined strictly to the purpose of procreation, which is analogous to saying that one should never partake of refreshment or other food not rigorously required for the sustentation of life. Possibly, too, the valuation of babies may be excessive. And then there are various schools holding to as varied theories, all, however, having 3 points in common,—the mixing

up of morals with physics, the supposition that a marriage contract differs from other contracts, and entire failure to provide a logical, durable, impregnable basis for ethics.

Now it is certainly not the intention of the FORUM to undertake a task so gigantic as the last. But, in its capacity as a pointer to sound and common-sense attitude by Theosophists, it may indicate some positions which will be salutary in a subject so important and so easily misunderstood as Theosophy.

First, then, it is idle and injurious to take ground which is antagonized by fact, the constitution of things, the necessities of life, or the structure of humanity. The perpetuation of the species by the existing mode is a fact, and it will not be in the least altered by distaste for it, or the belief that some other mode might be better, or the conviction that the present is liable to abuse. Of course some other mode may exist milleniums hence, just as it did milleniums ago, but that is unimportant, as the date is too distant for preparation. So, too, it is a fact that the existing mode is adapted to existing humanity, and that no amount of wails or adjurations will have the slightest effect in upsetting the system which Nature has prescribed and humanity approved. We have so much of practicable service before us that it is hardly worth while to expend strength on Quixotic campaigns, or on theories which convert nobody and only revolt men from a philosophy which otherwise would be acceptable and elevating.

Second, it is well to be alert against a tendency to becoming slave to an idea. The disclosures made in Theosophy of the past and the future of man are so stupendous, so amazing, that they thrill both reason and sentiment. One breathes the air of a limitless expanse, senses the glory of a new universe. Thus exhilarated, one can think of little else, feels practical environment a degradation. Yet there it is, and if one walks with his nose in the air and his eyes on the empyrean, he is pretty sure to bring up against the lamp-post or stumble over the ash-barrel. All these glorious visions need to be checked and coördinated with the most prosaic of facts, and Theosophists get one-sided when they see only one side.

Third, it is wise to make use of the experience of prede-

cessors. As has been said respecting the particular matter raised by the Question, history shows that an awakening spirituality usually turns at once to the genital system. Do not fall, then, into blunders already exposed. Dont make factitious distinctions, or construct fantastic systems, or suppose that one set of physical organs is essentially different from another. Be just as natural and clear-headed in your survey of generation as of digestion, and avoid historic mistakes in religion as promptly as you would like ones in any other field of thought. It will do you little good to know wherein your ancestors blundered if you forthwith blunder in precisely the same way. And you have less excuse because having had more warning.

Fourth, it is salutary to remember that nothing is more fatal to a nascent philosophy than absurdity. If you advance extreme propositions, or, indeed *any* propositions apart from their relations and qualifications and counterparts, you make them ridiculous and therefore repellent. If you tell human beings that the sexual function is inherently base, or that a truly refined humanity would revolt from it, or that it is only tolerable when perpetrated with one person and at times favored by influences of planets or comets or what not, they will laugh at you—and they ought to. What is much worse, they will impute your follies to Theosophy, and shut their ears to that as well.

Fifth, it is right to perceive that in Theosophy, as everywhere else, exceptional cases demand exceptional treatment. When men emerge from ordinary human pursuits and enter upon a distinctively Occult path, they necessarily need a different regimen and life. Physiological rules which have no relevancy in other careers become essential in this, just as the diet quite proper to other men must be changed for an athlete under training. When an Occultist under training foregoes marriage and meat, it is neither because marriage and meat are vicious nor because he is only doing what all men should do, but simply because *to his specific aim* these thiugs are a bar. If a person desires to unfold new faculties or gain new powers, he has to abandon whatever prevents acquisition, and he has to walk in the one way which leads thereto. It is not a question

of religion, or of morals, or even of ethics; it is a question of scientific discipline. All this has been explained many times, and is touched upon in FORUMS 10 and 13.

QUESTION CXLII.

To what extent are we assisted in our study of Theosophy by the Adept Masters?

Ans.—Read FORUM No. 1, Question XXII, for some cognate thoughts. It would be presumptuous in anybody, editor or otherwise, to define the scope of Masters' acts, and every intelligent Theosophist must disclaim such power. But it is quite legitimate to outline the general principles upon which They may be supposed to help, especially as certain messages from Them seem to give the clue.

The great earthly function of Masters is understood to be assistance, under the Law, to the evolution of humanity on the right line, *i. e.*, the line through physical conditions on to spiritual attainment. They do not seem concerned with matters of material, or even intellectual, progress, except so far as that progress may bear on the loftier plane of spiritual advance. And it is furthermore understood that this function is performed, like other functions, through a graduated scale of agencies, the higher supervising and working through the lower. A well-ordered system of administration is just as needful in spiritual as in material interests.

It would seem that the study of Theosophy has value in Masters' eyes according to the purpose which colors it. As a purely intellectual matter, They would have no special concern with it. A man who wishes to comprehend the principle of cosmic and human evolution, or what is the true analysis of man, or what is the scope of Karma, is engaged in commendable work when he reads *The Secret Doctrine* and other treatises, but, considered merely as informatory process, it no more appeals to Them than if he was studying Mathematics or Anatomy. He has his own mental outfit and is using it legitimately, but has no claim for special aid from a special and differently operating power.

But a man may pursue these studies with a desire for knowledge motived by the sense that such is the opening to the true path of development contemplated by Nature. In other words, he wants to know what he is so that he may become what he should be. This is a case wherein Higher Powers would naturally feel interest, and interest incites to help.

But there is still another case. It is where a man craves knowledge, not as a mental gratification, or even as the condition to self-development, but that it may be used to help others on the upward way. Now, this is a direct participation in the very spirit and aim of the Masters themselves, and so may be supposed sure of Their liveliest sympathy and fullest assistance. For there is nothing which so places a man *en rapport* with those Exalted Beings and so directly in the streams of magnetic stimulus which emanate from Them, as a disinterested wish to labor unselfishly for the good of humanity. When he feels, plans, works as They do, he is the most fitting agent for the effectuation of Their designs, and the most fitting recipient of all the aid necessary thereto.

Now what is the nature of that aid? In the purely mental region, which is the one covered by the Question, we may suppose it to be of stimulus and suggestion. There is no reason to expect any artificial enlargement of natural power or creation of new power, since the existing degree is the product of a man's Karma, but such as he has may receive healthful stimulus on the same principle as a writer is sometimes refreshed in his work by a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. More than this, he may receive suggestion. Such would not be miraculous at all, or anything different in principle from the help which all young students receive from those more progressed or from teachers. It is perfectly easy for unseen Masters through unseen channels to prompt a thought or implant a hint which the recipient may work out in his own way. It is not even necessary that it should come directly from a Master, for as the many and small operations in Their grand task are very properly entrusted to subordinates, just as is the case with analogous things on earth, such a thought or hint may be given by a Chela in the course of his assigned duty. And, in our small spheres

and elementary functions, we cannot ordinarily have need for more of that help than can abundantly well be given by one so far above us as is even a lower Chela. Actual interposition by Masters Themselves is probably confined to cases of more moment.

To the above, two important observations need addition. The first is that while all sincere, unselfish work merits and receives the approval of Masters, They have made no concealment of Their wish that such work should be specially done in and through the Theosophical Society. Theosophists have usually been somewhat cautious in emphasizing the Society as an instrumentality of Higher Powers lest the thought should be misunderstood, and lest there should be an apparent representation of the Society as a Church. But perhaps it would be well for us all at this era to be more outspoken, not only in view of the repeated language used by Masters (in the Simla letter They say, "The Theosophical Society was chosen as the corner-stone, the foundation of the future religion of humanity "), but most particularly in view of the explicit statement by one of Them to Col. Olcott and repeated by him to the London Convention. (Quoted in *Path* of Sep. '91). This distinctly states that persons desiring to approach nearer to Masters and sustain relations to Them must do so *through the Theosophical Society*. Some may resent this as to them savoring of ecclesiasticism, but, after all, if we wish to approach our superiors, we must do so in the way they point out and not in one of our own contrivance, and anyhow it is to be supposed that Masters know what They are about and do not take a stand without abundant justification. A Theosophist is therefore quite warranted in saying, "If you want the fullest measure of privilege and help vouchsafed to aspirants, come into the T. S., stop thinking about yourself and your rate of progress, get to work in some department, throw yourself unreservedly and whole-souledly into the spirit and mission of the Society, and you will receive every whit of help you deserve and need. If you ask the guarantee for this, it is very simple and conclusive—*Masters have said so.*"

The other observation is that recent communications have

most distinctly pledged the assistance of Masters to all, even the very humblest, who are doing what they can to sustain Them. There has probably never been a more important and significant message than that which forms the opening words of August *Path*. In September *Path* parts of other messages are quoted. Noting that all these have come since the departure of H. P. B.—a fact which has a meaning, there are two certainties which they make clear : 1st., that the effort to which help is promised is of sincere, unselfish work for *other people's* good; 2d, that the recipients of the help are not only the conspicuous leaders and writers, but the least and most obscure in the ranks. Each gets what he needs.

Reverting, then, to the Question "To what extent, &c., &c.," it may perhaps be safe to say that, while the amount of assistance to study probably depends much on the motive to the study, the extent of assistance to altruistic *work* will be the extent to which you have gained through work a claim to assistance, and the extent to which that assistance is needed. It may not take the form of a direct message, or of a conscious strengthening, or of any clearly-perceived gift, but it will take the form of what is best for you, and whether you sense it or not. You need have no misgivings as to the certainty of its arrival. "The humblest worker is seen and helped."

QUESTION CXLIII.

What evidence is there that the teachings of Christ and early Christianity were indebted to "Pagan Philosophy" and to the "Secret Doctrine" for their contents?

F. D. B.—First: the development of Greek Philosophy that culminated in Plato, declined with the Macedonian conquest, was temporarily revived by Ptolemy at Alexandria, and again reached its climax in and decline from the Neo-Platonists, Porphyry, Plotinus, and Iamblichus. Plato and some of the Neo-Platonists show themselves to have been Initiates in the Secret Doctrine, which is at all times and everywhere the same. *Second:* The existence and teaching of the Essenes at the time of Christ, as recorded by Philo Judæus and referred to by Jose-

phus. *Third:* The teachings of the Gnostics and Therapeutics. *Fourth:* The statement made by some of the Church Fathers. For example, St. Augustine: "What is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and was not absent from the human race until Christ came: from which time the true religion, *which existed already*, began to be called Christian. *Fifth:* The general teachings and personal experiences of Paul show him to have been an Initiate in the Secret Doctrine, no less than a follower of Christ. *Sixth:* The references in *St. John* to the Logos or "Word", the "Augoeides", the Atma-Buddhi of the *Secret Doctrine.*

QUESTION CXLIV.

Would no man accept annihilation if offered him?

Ans.—On the contrary, very many would. The annihilation of the hopelessly bad, as sometimes expounded in Theosophical writings, involves a long, slow process of inner wretchedness combined with Karmic externality, and is a terrific fate. But instantaneous extinction of existence, utter and permanent obliteration from the field of being, is a wholly different matter. Many a good man, sincere, worthy, devout, but weary of the disappointments and sorrows of earth, depressed from constant pain or heart-ache, knowing that emancipation is very distant and that innumerable troubles lie between, would hail with unspeakable gladness an assurance that all such could be foregone. He might not be willing to take annihilation at once, for he would prefer to fill up every duty remaining in the present incarnation, but if the death he must some time undergo could at that time be made complete, no more incarnations, no more suffering, no more consciousness, he would look forward to it with unqualified longings. He would lose, of course, future joys, but he would never feel the loss—there would be no longer a "he" to feel; and the abolition of certain sorrow would anyhow count for more than the abolition of uncertain bliss. If such a boon was offered to humanity, how many would reject it?

Still, it has not been and will not be. The Higher Powers,

doubtless with ample wisdom, have ordained progressive incarnations, and we have no choice but to undergo them, attractive as their cessation might be. However much and sincerely some of us may covet annihilation, we cannot have it, and perhaps it would be wrong to cherish a desire which must be vain and may be hurtful. As we can't have what we want, it is better to use emotional force towards what we can get, and, as extinction is impossible, put up with evolution.

QUESTION CXLV.

Is not all sin simply ignorance, and more deserving of pity and instruction than of punishment?

Ans.—By no means. Ignorance is doubtless the parent of much evil, and the spread of enlightenment will of course diminish its progeny, but all transgressions cannot be traced to want of knowledge. As to "sin", one must first determine its exact meaning. If one accepts the Pelagian definition, "the wilful violation of known law", sin can never be the result of ignorance. Allowing it, however, a wider range, it cannot be said that there is no sin save from ignorance. Many well-instructed men, quite conversant with principles of morality and laws of life, have been conspicuous for misdeeds, and if the secret history of all men was uncovered, it would be found that virtue was by no means coëxtensive with knowledge. The Question assumes that men invariably act upon what they know to be right, thus making information the spring to action, whereas the real spring is desire. If the desire be for what is fine and true, the outcome will be accordingly; but if it is for self-gratification, evil will unhesitatingly be practiced. No amount of abstract knowledge will restrain a man from doing what he wishes to. Drunkards understand perfectly that drink means disease, disorder, wretchedness, and penury, but they drink all the same. A seducer is not restrained from plots by foreseeing the life-long results of their success. Clergymen and Sunday-School superintendents often have perpetrated moral enormities, though trained teachers of the very law they have defied. There can be no greater misconception of human na-

ture than to suppose that because a man understands his duty he will therefore perform it.

Whether sin deserves pity and instruction rather than punishment depends upon how far the sinner has acted up to his lights. If ignorant, the pity and instruction are appropriate. But if well-informed, it is not more information that he needs, and he has no claim to pity, so that punishment, and plenty of it, would seem to be fitting. We must never forget, as the FORUM has repeatedly pointed out, that the proper recipients of sympathy are not scoundrels but their victims, and that it is a distortion of all rational sentiment to expend it on deliberate evil-doers, while gazing unmoved on honest people whom they have made to suffer. Let us not slip into maudlinness, supposing it tenderness, and let us not delude ourselves with the notion that we can be wiser than Nature, who is always alert for remedial measures, indeed, but who often finds pain the most efficacious, even the only, spur to reformation. And the very uprising of our inner nature before some spectacle of cruelty or outrage is an instinctive utterance of Nature to the effect that gross injustice would be done by pity, or by any other treatment than the severest discipline.

QUESTION CXLVI.

Does not the doctrine of Karma teach fatalism?

Ans.—Not if you understand it aright. It teaches, in fact, exactly the opposite. As to events, fatalism holds that they will come to pass, no matter what men do, whereas Theosophy holds that they are the consequences of what men do, and, therefore, if nothing was done, nothing could result. As to persons, fatalism holds that they do and can do only what was previously determined by fate, whereas Theosophy holds that they are free to do as they choose, and are responsible in virtue of that fact. Fatalism dispenses from concern because useless; Theosophy enjoins it because vital. Fatalism cancels responsibility; Theosophy emphasizes it. The two systems are therefore antipodal.

Karma, as has been explained over and over again, is the universal law of cause and effect. All scientists hold to it in

the form of *the persistence of force.* Let them extend the conception from the department of physics to those of mind, thought, and spirit,—cease, in other words, restricting it to forces in matter and let it sweep everywhere else as well, and they will have the conception denoted by the word "Karma". If it is not fatalism to hold that the blow of a hammer will excite vibrations which will produce certain consequences and will continue on and on till the impetus is exhausted, it is not fatalism to hold that in the more rarefied region of mind a thought will excite analogous vibrations equally sure to last till exhausted. If it would be unscientific to believe that effects can arise without a cause, or causes act without effect, or causes and effects have no quantitative relation, the belief must be as unscientific in unseen realms as in seen. Nature's laws are not changed to suit our eyesight. And if it would be not merely unscientific but foolish to conduct business on the supposition that events come to pass without reason or sequence or relation, it must be no less so to act likewise in the regions of opinion or wish or moral obligation or spiritual purpose. Karma operates everywhere, and we do not escape it by ignoring it, or dodge it by giving it a false name. Once realize that it is the extension through all realms of a principle fully recognized in one, and many of its difficulties will disappear. For "Karma" is not a mere term to express a mere theory of Eastern device, but a comprehensive expression for a great Law in all departments of being.

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